

Buckling up is everybody's business

Wearing a seat belt is the single most effective thing a person can do to protect themselves in a traffic crash. It takes only two seconds to buckle up and reduce the chances of injury or death by nearly half.

Considering the minimal time and effort, there is no better return on investment. That's why the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning (OHSP) is raising awareness about the benefits of seat belts during its *Michigan Summer of Safety* campaign.

Unfortunately, too many people don't reap the dividends of this easy-to-use safety feature. About half of those killed in motor vehicle crashes nationwide are not wearing seat belts. Every day we lose moms, dads, grandparents, brothers, sisters, daughters, sons, friends, and co-workers in crashes because they didn't buckle up.

Above and beyond the heartache of these traffic fatalities, the economic costs are staggering. According to a report by the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), crashes cost employers \$47.4 billion and resulted in 1.6 million lost work days nationwide during 2013. Of those lost days, nearly 90 percent were attributed to traffic crashes that occurred away from the job.

Driver behavior has a direct effect on employer crash costs. Speeding resulted in \$8.4 billion in crash-related expenses, with distracted driving close behind, at \$8.2 billion. Driving under the influence of alcohol resulted in \$6 billion in losses and not wearing a seat belt added \$4.9 billion to the total. In addition, the NETS report finds that medical costs paid by employers per employee injured in a crash were nearly double in on-the-job crashes where the employee was not wearing a seat belt and increased by a third for off-the-job crashes.

Although there is plenty of evidence that seat belts save lives and reduce injuries, some myths remain. They include:

MYTH: Drivers in air bag-equipped vehicles don't need to wear seat belts.

FACT: Air bags provide supplemental protection in frontal crashes, but motorists can slide under them if they are not wearing a seat belt. In addition, air bags will not help in side or rear impact or rollover crashes. Motorists should wear a seat belt for protection in all types of crashes.

MYTH: I'd rather be thrown clear in a crash.

FACT: Being thrown safely clear in a crash is almost impossible. When you're thrown, you may be thrown through the windshield, scraped along the pavement, or even crushed by your own vehicle or another one. The idea of being thrown from a car and gently landing in a grassy area beside the road is pure fantasy. The best bet in a crash is to stay inside the vehicle, securely held by a seat belt.

MYTH: I'm not going far and I won't be going fast.

FACT: Most crash deaths occur within 25 miles of home and at speeds of less than 40 miles per hour. This emphasizes that everyday driving from just one neighbor's home to another, to school, or to the corner store poses the greatest danger.

MYTH: The chance that I'll have a crash is so small, those things only happen to other people.

FACT: It's comfortable to think that crashes only happen to others. However, one out of three people will be seriously injured in a car crash sometime during their lives. This is really a significant risk. We never know when it will occur or how it will occur.

MYTH: I'm a good driver, it won't happen to me.

FACT: You may be a good driver but you cannot always control the other drivers on the road. Even if you are driving defensively, a distracted or impaired driver coming around the next curve may not be.

The facts add up. For traffic safety to be effective, we need to work at it every day. Traffic fatalities and serious injuries on the roadways increase during the summer months. Buckle up every trip. Seat belts should never have time off.

To learn more about the NETS report or how to encourage others to practice road safety, a free online toolkit is available at [2seconds2click](#). Free Michigan Summer of Safety materials about seat belts as well as bicycle, pedestrian, motorcycle, and child passenger safety are available from the OHSP on www.michigan.gov/ohsp.